

Message Text

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ORIGIN EB-02

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-01 AF-01 /005 R

66011

DRAFTED BY: AF/W:BSKIRKPATRICK:EB/IFD/ODF:RKAUZLARICH:IW

APPROVED BY: EB/IFD/ODF:JWINDER

AF/W:TWMSMITH

EUR/WE:JDOBBINS

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P 200445Z NOV 76

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

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FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO NAIROBI FROM
ABIDJAN NOV 17:

QUOTE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE ABIDJAN 10862

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: BTRA, BGEN, EGEN, PDEV, IV

SUBJECT: BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL HOSTS FIRST BLACK

AFRICAN ROUNDTABLE IN ABIDJAN

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: SEVENTEEN FIRMS RESPONDED TO BUSINESS
INTERNATIONAL'S INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FIRST
BLACK AFRICAN ROUNDTABLE, HELD IN ABIDJAN NOVEMBER 7-10.
GROUP HAD LONG INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS WITH SEVEN IMPORTANT
CABINET MINISTERS AND LONG AND UNUSUALLY CANDID DISCUSSION
WITH PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY HIMSELF. HOUPHOUET TOLD
THE GROUP THAT IVORY COAST WAS NOT A PRIVATE FRENCH "GAME
PRESERVE" -- A CLEAR INVITATION TO US INVESTORS. FURTHER,
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR RECOLLECTION PRESIDENT ADDRESSED
THE QUESTION AS TO WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN HE PASSES FROM
THE SCENE, ASSURING, IF NOT ENTIRELY CONVINCING THE GROUP
THAT ALL WOULD BE WELL. ALTHOUGH MISSION CAN BE COUNTED
A SUCCESS IVORIANS NOTED THAT ROUNDTABLE IS ONLY THE
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LATEST OF SEVERAL GROUP ORIENTATION TRIPS THROUGH

IVORY COAST, WHICH HAVE PRODUCED NO RPT NO SUBSEQUENT INVESTMENTS. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THE GROUP APPROACH, AS USEFUL A TOOL AS IT IS, MIGHT BE PLAYED DOWN FOR THE TIME BEING, AND PRIVATE INVESTORS ENCOURAGED TO DEAL WITH INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS. END SUMMARY.

2. BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL HOSTED ITS FIRST BLACK AFRICAN ROUNDTABLE IN ABIDJAN FROM NOVEMBER 7 THROUGH 10. PARTICIPATING COMPANIES WERE AMERICAN CYANAMID, ARTHUR ANDERSEN, BRUNSWICK, CHASE MANHATTAN, COMBUSTION ENGINEERING, CONTROL DATA, COOK INDUSTRIES, DAI-ICHI KANGYO BANK, HOECHST AG, INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS AND CONTROLS, MITSUI, MONSANTO, OWENS-ILLINOIS, RHONE-POULENC, SWEDISH MATCH, UNION CARBIDE, AND WESTINGHOUSE ELECTRIC CORPORATION. THE 17 HIGH-RANKING EXECUTIVES OF THE PARTICIPATING FIRMS PLUS TWO OFFICIALS OF BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL HAD ONE AND A HALF HOUR SESSIONS WITH SEVEN MINISTERS, CAPPED ON THE AFTERNOON OF NOVEMBER 10 BY AN HOUR AND A HALF SESSION WITH PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY. THE SEVEN MINISTERS WERE JEAN-BAPTISTE MOCKEY, PUBLIC HEALTH; HENRI KONAN BEDIE, ECONOMY AND FINANCE; MOHAMED DIAWARA, PLAN; ABDOULAYE SAWADOGO, AGRICULTURE; MAURICE SERI GNOLEBA, COMMERCE; DESIRE BONI, PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION; AND ALBERT VANIE BI TRA, OF LABOR. THOUGH THERE WERE SEVERAL NON-AMERICAN FIRMS AMONG THE GROUP, THE MINISTERS AND THE PRESIDENT ADDRESSED THEMSELVES FOR THE MOST PART TO AMERICANS.

3. ASKING THAT VIEWS BE KEPT IN CONFIDENCE, BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVES TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT, VIRTUALLY WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THE MINISTERS HAD BEEN FORTHCOMING, SINCERE, AND WELL PREPARED. GROUP WAS MOST IMPRESSED BY PLAN MINISTER DIAWARA, WHO HAD BEEN FRANK OR EVEN BLUNT WITH THEM. HE TOLD THE GROUP IVORY COAST HAD PULLED OUT ALL STOPS FOR A NUMBER OF THESE PROMOTION-ORIENTATION PROGRAMS, BUT THAT NOTHING EVER HAPPENED THEREAFTER. HE SAID IVORY COAST WOULD PREFER CONCRETE DISCUSSIONS ABOUT SPECIFIC PROJECTS, FOLLOWED BY AMERICAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INVESTMENT MANAGED BY AMERICANS, NOT EUROPEANS. HE STRESSED THE THEME THAT THE IVORY COAST IS NOT A PRIVATE GAME PRESERVE OF THE FRENCH, AND THAT GOIC WANTS A DEFINITE AMERICAN PRESENCE HERE. ALL THE MINISTERS MADE THIS LATTER POINT. BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVES SAID THAT THE GROUP WAS NOT QUITE CONVINCED, HAVING NOTED THE STRONG FRENCH INFLUENCE HERE, BUT AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT THE SITUATION IS CLEARLY

CHANGING, AND ASKED THEM TO REMEMBER THAT THE FRENCH PRESENCE OVER THE YEARS HAD HELPED CREATE THE STABLE CONDITIONS THAT ENABLE AMERICANS TO INVEST WITH CONFIDENCE IN IVORY COAST. BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVES SAID THAT VANIE BI TRA, MINISTER OF LABOR, MADE AN INTERESTING POINT ABOUT IVORIANIZATION. HE SAID GOIC DOES NOT SEEK TO REPLACE WHITE WITH BLACK, BUT COMPETENCE WITH COMPETENCE.

4. SUBSTANCE OF LONG AND UNUSUALLY FRANK PRESENTATION BY PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY WAS PUBLISHED THE FOLLOWING MORNING IN GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED DAILY, FRATERNITE MATIN. HOUPHOUET REITERATED THAT IVORY COAST IS NOT A PRIVATE FRENCH GAME PRESERVE, WHICH HE HAS SAID BEFORE (BUT NOT IN PRINT). HE ELABORATED THAT THROUGHOUT AFRICA THE VALUE OF SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE TWO PRINCIPAL COLONIAL POWERS HAS DIMINISHED IN FAVOR OF WIDER INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION. FOR THIS REASON, HE SAID, IVORY COAST KEEPS THE DOOR OPEN TO ALL; THE SOLE CONDITION IS YAT THERE BE NO MEDDLING IN IVORY COAST'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. HE REFERRED TO IVORY COAST AS A GLASS HOUSE WITH NOTHING TO HIDE, AND TOLD THE BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL GROUP THAT IT WAS NOT ONLY WELCOME, BUT LONG AWAITED. HE THEN UNEXPECTEDLY ADDRESSED THE QUESTION OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN WHEN HE LEAVES OFFICE. HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THE CONCERN OF THE FOREIGN INVESTOR. THE IVORY COAST UNDER HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY HAS PROGRESSED AND DEVELOPED IN PEACE. WHAT WILL TOMORROW BRING? HE ASSURED THE GROUP THAT ALL WOULD BE WELL. IVORY COAST HAS PREPARED THE NEXT GENERATION TO KEEP THE COUNTRY ON THE COURSE ALREADY CHARTED BY THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP. HE RECOGNIZED THE DIFFICULTIES CONFRONTING YOUNG DEVELOPING STATES, BUT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SAID THAT IVORY COAST KNOWS HOW TO SOLVE ITS OWN PROBLEMS, AND DO IT SMOOTHLY.

5. ON IVORIANIZATION, THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT WHEN IVORY COAST ACHIEVED INDEPENDENCE IT WAS FACED WITH TWO CHOICES -- IMMEDIATE AFRICANIZATION, OR THE GRADUAL REPLACEMENT OF EXPATRIATES WITH TRAINED IVORIAN PERSONNEL. THE IVORY COAST CHOSE THE LATTER, BECAUSE TO DO OTHERWISE WOULD HAVE BEEN A STEP BACKWARD. IVORY COAST HAD SOUGHT THE DEVELOPMENT OF GENUINE TRAINED BLACK LEADERSHIP FOR THE COUNTRY. NOW, HE SAID, THE MAJORITY OF HIS MINISTERS ARE WELL TRAINED AND YOUNG, AS WELL AS THE CABINET DIRECTORS, IVORIAN BANK DIRECTORS, AND OTHERS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

6. COMMENT: THIS ROUNDTABLE WAS CERTAINLY A SUCCESS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL. IT RECEIVED THE FULLEST COOPERATION FROM THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE IVORIAN GOVERNMENT. IT IS INTERESTING THAT THE PRESIDENT PUBLICLY TOLD THE GROUP THAT IVORY COAST IS NOT THE PRIVATE GAME PRESERVE OF THE FRENCH. THIS SHOULD NOT BE READ AS ANTI-FRENCH, BUT AS A VERY OPEN INVITATION TO AMERICAN INVESTORS TO MAKE MUTUALLY PROFITABLE INVESTMENTS IN IVORY COAST. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES POTENTIAL INVESTORS SHOULD HEED THE WORDS OF DIAWARA AND BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF PARTICULAR PROJECTS. IN THIS ROUNDTABLE, WE UNDERSTAND ONLY CONTROL DATA HAD AN IMMEDIATE INTEREST IN INVESTING. BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL WILL DISSEMINATE A REPORT AMONG ITS ENTIRE MEMBERSHIP, AND THIS COULD AROUSE FURTHER INTEREST. BUT IT MIGHT BE IN OUR BEST INTERESTS TO PLAY DOWN THE GROUP APPROACH FOR A WHILE, AND ENCOURAGE INDIVIDUAL INVESTORS TO EXAMINE SPECIFIC PROJECTS. END COMMENT. STEARNS UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MEETING REPORTS, BUSINESS FIRMS, INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES, PROGRAMS (PROJECTS), SELFDETERMINATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 NOV 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976STATE285777
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: AF/W:BSKIRKPATRICK:EB/IFD/ODF:RKAUZLARICH:IW
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760432-0602
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761128/aaaaaxqj.tel
Line Count: 188
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN EB
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 APR 2004 by greeneet>; APPROVED <12 OCT 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL HOSTS FIRST BLACK AFRICAN ROUNDTABLE IN ABIDJAN
TAGS: BTRA, BGEN, EGEN, PDEV, IV, (HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY, FELIX)
To: PARIS
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006